

Hell Discussion

from Substance Church Series, "Stumped" April-May 2013

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE REALLY TEACH ABOUT HELL?

"The senseless man does not know,
fools do not understand,
that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish,
they will be *forever* destroyed."

Psalm 92:6

"Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity,
not laying again the foundation of repentance...and **eternal judgment.**"

Hebrews 6:12

People are definitely more interested in the doctrines of hell after Rob Bell's book "Love Wins" hit the shelves. Honestly, I've always been fascinated by the doctrines of reprobation. If you want to be sure about two topics, the doctrines of hell and salvation seem a prudent place to start!

Keep in mind, thirteen years ago, I was quite obsessive about studying this. As a young senior pastor, I had numerous people in our church who were saying "hell doesn't exist in scripture." Of course, this is a rather dangerous doctrine to get wrong. And it seemed like a small war was breaking out in our church... a church that already lacked unity. In some ways, I over-reacted by writing a 170 page treatise on the doctrines of hell. (The truth was: I liked to research theology). And during that period, I probably read a hundred books on the subject. So, you could imagine that, when Rob Bell's *Love Wins* hit the shelves, I was rather curious to hear what he said.

For a season, it seemed like everyone was hating on Rob Bell – even before *Love Wins*. At first, I thought it was simply because he pushes the envelope. And, as a person who gets a lot of random hate mail, my first thought was, "leave the poor guy alone."

For example, I once had an entire hate-podcast devoted against me. The hater literally said: "*Pastor Peter Haas doesn't even believe in music in church!!*" (A claim that is obviously ridiculous). Even worse, other people started quoting this man's misinformation. (That's half of the problem with the internet.) Pretty soon, people were writing me all sorts of bizarre letters based on bad information: "*Why don't you believe in music!? ...How come you disagree with Communion!?*" (claims that are simply ridiculous). Throughout the process, I realized that there are some irrationally screwed up and fearful people who will hate you – and will never even bother to check their facts. And even when we're right, "*wisdom from heaven is... peaceloving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit...*" (James 3:17). But a lot of Christians don't read *those* scriptures. So, when it came to *Love Wins*, I thought it was just another excuse for the haters to rise up. Unfortunately, when I read *Love Wins*, Bell gave them a lot

of good fodder. Unfortunately, he made a good number of statements that simply aren't sustainable.

Don't get me wrong: I actually *like* Rob Bell. I think his heart is in the right place. And I totally agree with him that many people have been abused with the doctrines of hell. At the same time, I'd hate for people to be confused by clever sounding arguments about greek words and decontextualized Early Church Fathers. There are so many strong statements that simply don't jive with solid academic research.

In the end, I could be completely misinterpreting Bell's arguments too. I want to give him the benefit of the doubt while simultaneously pointing out my current objections. So, I hope everyone gets a spirit of humility throughout this document. The last thing the body of Christ needs is another person stirring up stupid fights.

So, in a nutshell, here were my *main* problems with *Love Wins* that I will expand upon below. (1). Bell made it sound like there were an incredibly small number of Bible verses on Hell (& he claimed to quote "all" of them); but there are dozens of texts that he never referenced; (2). He made Greek and Hebrew arguments that simply don't fully jive with the breadth of lexicography. (3). He made it sound like many of the Early Church Fathers didn't really believe in hell; (or, at least, believed that hell is temporary.) But as an avid reader of the Anti-Nicene Fathers, I just didn't feel like his characterizations were accurate. In many ways, it seemed like he borrowed many of his arguments from the Jehovah's Witnesses playbook. So, it didn't surprise me that so many people objected to his scholarship.

So, with all this in mind, allow me to hit these three topics below.

(1). Are there an incredibly small number of Bible verses on Hell?

In *Love Wins*, Bell lists the verses with the word "Hell" in it (chapter 3). And then he claims that all of what we know about the actual word hell comes from this small number of verses. Of course, his statement is incredibly misleading because, he makes it sound like "everything we know about eternal judgement (including hell) comes from these verses. Keep in mind, a large number of the verses forming the doctrines of hell do not have the word "hell" in them.

In other words, imagine doing a Bible study on the single word "God" and then saying: "This is everything we know in the Bible about 'God.'" This would become the most anemic study on God ever done because, we all know, there are dozens of other words for "God." He has many names. And so does Hell. If someone wanted to do a decent study on hell, you would have to look at many names and expressions such as: *grave, lake of fire, eternal judgement, fire, flame, destruction, blackest darkness, everlasting torment, damnation, Lucifer, Gehenna, punishment, wrath, forever, etc.*

For example: The following verse may not have the word "hell" but it's hard to imagine it to be talking about something else:

2 Thess. 1:8-9 [Jesus] will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

Or consider Matthew's depiction:

Matthew 25:46 ⁴⁶"Then [on the day of judgement] they [the cursed] will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Bell also made it seem like Hell may not be *eternal*. But the following list just doesn't seem to suggest that:

Hebrews 6:12 ¹Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ²instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and **eternal judgment**. (NIV)

Isaiah 33:14 14 The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: "Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us

can dwell with **everlasting burning**?" (NIV)

Matthew 25:46 ⁴⁶"Then [on day of judgement] the [cursed] will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (NIV)

- **Note: the same Greek word for eternal in "eternal life" is same as "eternal punishment"**

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with **everlasting destruction** and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power
Jude :13 They [men w/a false gospel] are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom **blackest darkness** has been reserved **forever**. (NIV)

Jude :6-7 "And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home - these he has kept in darkness, bound with **everlasting** chains for judgement on the great day. IN a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of **eternal** fire.

Revelation 14:9-11 ⁹A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, ¹⁰he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹**And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever**. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." (NIV)

Dan. 12:2-3 "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake . . . others to shame and **everlasting contempt**"

Psalms 92:6 "The senseless man does not know, fools do not understand, that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be **forever destroyed**."

1 Chronicles 28:9 "...for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you **forever**."

Galatians 1:8 "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be **eternally condemned!**"

Mark 3:29 "But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will **never** be forgiven; he is guilty of an **eternal sin**."

Bell says: "*There is a long tradition of Christians who believe that God will ultimately restore everything and everybody*" (Pg. 107). Yet, it's hard to believe that any *Biblical* Christian could suddenly believe such a thing. And these are just a few of the verses I found. The only way a person could undermine these foundations is by reinventing the meaning of the words "forever" and "eternal." So allow me to shift our discussion to lexicography.

(2). What do the Greek and Hebrew words for Hell, Eternal, etc, really mean?

After reading the verses above, someone might ask: *But what if the Greek word for "eternal" or "forever" doesn't really mean 'forever'? Or what if "hell" simply means "grave." Or, what if the Greek word "Gehenna" really means "the Valley of Hinnom?"* Bell makes many suggestions about these words that simply don't stack up. We will start with the words: Sheol and Qeber; then move onto Gehenna and Aeion.

"Sheol"

Bell writes: "*the Hebrew commentary on [sheol, death and the grave] isn't very articulated or defined,*" and thus, "*the precise details...aren't things the Hebrew writers were terribly concerned with*" (Pg. 67). As we will find in a minute, this isn't entirely true. He assumes we can interpret words like sheol in just about any way we like (as there isn't enough information to inform our interpretations).

One of my universalist friends claims that "the Old Testament word for hell (a.k.a. *sheol*) simply means "the grave." (Universalists are people who believe *everyone* goes to heaven regardless of their

will). Therefore, many universalists object to any word translated “Hell”. However, from a lexicography stand-point, it's rather hard to argue that *sheol* could *exclusively* mean the grave. Here's why:

First of all, the common Old Testament Hebrew word for *grave* is “*Queber*” (*kee-Bur*). Almost any writer wanting to discuss a “literal grave” where a body is buried, they would have chosen the word *Queber*. In the Old Testament, there was clearly no confusion between the usage and implication of this word. Certainly, on rare occasions *Sheol* was used metaphorically to describe a “hellish” or “Grave-like” scenario; however, it is still impossible to argue that *Sheol* exclusively meant grave, or that ancient Hebrews ever confused the common meaning of *Queber* and *Sheol*. And to demonstrate this, allow me to show you five important contextual comparisons:

1. In O.T. the *physical body* never literally goes to *Sheol*
Yet it goes to *Queber* 37 times
2. *Sheol* is never clearly located on the face of the earth
But *Queber* is located ‘on the earth’ 32 times
3. Man ‘never puts another man’ into *Sheol*
But puts man into a *Queber* 33 times
Implying: Man cannot ‘literally place’ a man in *Sheol*
4. Man never ‘digs’ or ‘makes’ a *Sheol*
But he makes a *Queber* 6 times
Implying: can’t ‘make a place’ for a soul
5. Man never speaks of a man ‘touching’ *Sheol*
But he touches a *Queber* 6 times

The only exceptions to these comparisons are when the author is clearly using *sheol* in a metaphoric sense or as a simile. In other words, the author is describing “hellish” scenarios such as the modern expression, “*my life is a living hell*”. (I.e., the expression isn’t denoting the literal spiritual hell.) For example “...*out of the belly of Sheol I cried...*” *Jonah 2:2*. *Jonah* didn’t mean the “literal *Sheol*”. Merely a *sheol*-like scenario (and being in the belly of a big fish classifies as a pretty bad day).

But here's my point: These comparisons demonstrate that the Hebrews had a word that exclusively meant “The Grave” (*Queber*). This was the primary word for referring to physical death, or the location thereof. But *sheol* clearly took on a broader spiritual implication in its context.

For example: Proverbs 23:14 “*Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.*” In this verse we see the author associate “death” (*sheol*) with a clear spiritual implication “save his soul”. A similar “spiritual association” can be found in Psm.16:10, “*You will not leave my soul in sheol...*” These and others like them prove that *sheol* is an expression that dealt with a realm which was not “limited” to the physical. Again, in order to substantiate their extreme claim, Universalists *must argue* the highly improbable claim that *sheol* exclusively means the “physical grave.”

To add to this improbability, let’s add the evidence of the Septuagint. Before the time of Christ, the Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament were translated into Greek. The Septuagint was completed in Alexandria around 200 B.C. And this translation is very important because, it gives us keen insights into what ancient Hebrews understood their own Hebrew words to mean. These ancient translators had many Greek words from which they could choose. The words they selected tend to consistently show *how* they interpreted their own Old Testament words. Naturally, they are in a better position to determine the connotative meanings of their Hebrew language than Twentieth Century Jehovah's Witnesses.

In the Septuagint, the word *Sheol* is almost always translated with the word *Hades*. *Hades* would be a horrible word to use if one was attempting to *exclusively* mean “grave”. This is because, if you

survey it's use in most ancient texts, Hades almost exclusively carried the notion of life after death. This can be shown contextually in much the same way we evaluated Sheol above. Though *hades* can be used to refer to the grave, it would *also* almost be impossible to argue that Hades *exclusively* denoted the grave and nothing more.

And once again we ask: *Why is this important?* It's important because, it gives us another interpretive key into how early Biblical interpreters understood their own words. Put plainly: these translators (in addition to the original authors) could have easily selected a word that plainly meant “the grave” in Greek, but they did not.

The Greek Word *Gehenna*

“**Gehenna**” is one of the Greek words for hell. Most evangelical scholars agree that when people die without Christ, they immediately go to *Hades*, which is the “temporary hell”. Then, at the resurrection of the dead, the soul is reunited with the body (to stand judgement); and, after judgement, the reunited soul and body will go to Gehenna (the permanent hell), also known as the Lake of Fire.

Universalists claim that Gehenna was “merely a sad location” outside Jerusalem but not a place for souls. Therefore, Universalists claim Jesus was probably using this as a metaphor for a miserable life. However, this does not make any logical sense.

Don't misunderstand me: Gehenna is indeed etymologically related to the *literal place* called the Valley of Hinnom (Gay-hinnom). The Valley of Hinnom was an awful burning garbage dump outside of Jerusalem. In more ancient times it was the location of an idol (to which they would make constant human sacrifices to false gods). Jesus used this appalling, reeking, constantly burning “physical place” as a mental picture to denote *another place* which was far worse.

In fact, a careful study of this word in the New Testament would reveal that Gehenna seemed to be used synonymously & interchangeably with the concept of “the lake of fire”. But Jesus intimated that he was *not merely* referring to the literal valley of Hinnom. In fact, if we were to apply Universalism's literal '*earthly interpretation*' of this word to its contexts, it would make absolutely no sense in at least half of them.

For example: in Mt.10, as Jesus is sending out his disciples to teach, he prepares them for the persecution they might experience. He charges them to not be afraid or discouraged if anyone rejects them. Jesus' reason was because: “*whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.*” Just previous to this, he says in vs.28, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna].”

First of all, why would Jesus and his disciples be scared about the literal valley? After all, they are not going to be anywhere near this actual location. So is Jesus merely warning them not to evangelize there? Logically, this would make no sense.

Secondly, Jesus makes it clear that Gehenna is where the soul *and* body are killed, & not merely the body. In other words, the word has a clear ‘spiritual’ implication about it.

And this isn't a “new” interpretation. After all, many Early Church Fathers believed similarly: “*For we believe...that every man will suffer punishment in eternal fire according to the merits of his deed....Sensation remains to all who have ever lived, and eternal punishment is laid up....Gehenna is a place where those who have lived wickedly are to be punished.*” Justin Martyr (circa.160 A.D) (1.168,169).

In other words, Justin Martyr's understanding of Gehenna completely contradicts the Universalistic literal interpretation. He's almost a contemporary of the Apostles, and he views Gehenna not as

something “*already occurring*” but rather something that has yet to occur.

In studying many *contextual uses* of Hades, you will find that this is the place where the soul goes *after* it departs from the body. This would correctly correlate with the word *Sheol* in the O.T. However, remember that *Gehenna* is the place where both the *soul and the body* go. In Revelations 20:11 we witness what is often called the Great White Throne Judgement. We see *Hades* give up the dead [souls] to be judged (along with the physical bodies *Dan12:2*) and thrown body & soul into the “Lake of Fire”. And this *Lake of Fire* is considered synonymous with *Gehenna* because of the consistent similitudes routinely referenced within the usage contexts of these words (See *Gehenna* in Mk 9:43).

Thus, as Kittle's Theological dictionary states: “The NT distinguishes between *Hades* and *Gehenna* : a. the former is temporary [like a local jail before judgement day], the latter definitive [like a permanent penitentiary after judgement day] (cf. Mk. 9:43, 48); b. the former is for the soul alone, the latter for the *reunited body and soul* [reunited at judgement day] (Mk. 9:43ff.; Mt. 10:28). *Gehenna* is non-existent as of now (Mt. 25:41). It is manifested as a fiery abyss (Mk. 9:43) *after* the general resurrection. Those who fall victim to divine judgment (Mt. 5:22; 23:33) will be destroyed there with eternal fire. The ungodly are sons of *Gehenna* (Mt. 23:15). They go to it with Satan and the demons (Mt. 25:41; cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:10-11). The threat of *Gehenna* in the NT is used to show the seriousness of sin and to awaken the conscience to fear of the divine anger (Mt. 10:28; 23:33). Even contemptuous words must be avoided (Mt. 5:22); no sacrifice is too costly in the war against sin (Mk. 9:43ff).”

Eternal Hell & the Greek word “*Aion*”³

Now, onto the Greek word “*aion*” or “*aionios*.” Many Jehovah's Witnesses claim that these Greek words are incorrectly translated as “eternal” or “everlasting” but instead mean “indefinite period of time” or “a specific age”. It claimed that the alleged “accurate” Greek word for *eternal* is *never* found in relation to the punishment of unbelievers. Therefore, all of the dozens of passages referring to “eternal punishment” or “eternal fire” instead probably mean “temporary purifying fires”. Thus, universalists can avoid all of these texts as being evidence of an eternal hell.

Second, the doctrines of eternal punishment hardly rest upon the two small Greek words: “*aion*” and “*aidios*”. There are other words and verses that can communicate this same proof. For *one* example, Hebrew's “*Olam*”:

Daniel 12:2-3 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and **everlasting contempt**.³ Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

Isaiah 33:14 The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: “Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?” (NIV)

Third: Although there is an element of truth to universalism's claims about “*aion*” denoting an “Age” or “specific time”, it is impossible to make the extreme claim that *aion* “can never mean ‘eternal’”.

The writers at CARM.org illustrated this specific abuse in their essay “A Look at the word *Aionion*”:

“For example consider this verse that is speaking about God: “...*who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen* (1 Tim.6:16). The context is obviously dealing with God's eternal nature. The word in Greek for “immortality” is “*athanatos*.” The Greek word for death is “*thanatos*.” The “*a*” in front of the word is the negator, without, non, etc. It means that God is deathless;

hence, immortal. This is an eternal quality of God. Likewise, the verse states that God has eternal dominion. The word for "eternal" is "aionios" which is derived from the Greek root "aion" which means age. But, God is not immortal for only an "age," nor is His dominion temporal. The word "eternal" is absolutely the best way to translate the Greek "aionion" because God is immortal and eternal. Therefore, it would be wrong to translate the verse by stating that God has "aionion" dominion. Rather, He has eternal dominion.

In other words, there are many contexts like this which necessitate the translation "eternal". But remember, Universalists and Jehovah's Witnesses require us to deny all possibility of this translation. Why? Because, if this possibility exists, it creates an immediate mountain of potential evidence against them.

Fourth: Even if there were to be some "new revelation" about the Greek word "Aion" that is about to sweep the Greek community, there are some uses of it that still nullify this argumentation. Take for example, **Revelation 14:9-11** ⁹A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, ¹⁰he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹**And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever.** There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

So, let's say this "new definition theory" is correct. *Are we to interpret this verse as saying, "And the smoke of their torment will rise from undefined time-periods to other undefined time-periods?"* Clearly, here is a rapid repetition of this word that necessitates the "standard" interpretation of this word. And there are many more examples of this linguistic use in the N.T.

Again, as the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament wrote (about the word "aion"): *a. The concepts of time and eternity merge in the use with prepositions suggesting indefinite time (Lk. 1:70; Acts 3:21; Jn. 9:32; Jude 13). Sometimes the meaning is "from a remote time" (Lk. 1:70; Jn. 9:32—"never"), but sometimes there is a strong hint of eternity (Lk. 1:55; Jn. 6:51). This is especially true of the plural (Mt. 6:13; Lk. 1:33; Rom. 1:25; Heb. 13:8; Jude 25; cf. also with a past reference 1 Cor. 2:7; Col. 1:26; Eph. 3:11). The double formula "for ever and ever" (Heb. 1:8), especially in the plural (in Paul and Revelation; cf. also Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 4:11), is designed to stress the concept of eternity, as are constructions like that in Eph. 3:21 ("to all generations for ever and ever").*

(3). What did the Early Church Fathers really Believe about Hell?

Bell suggested that, perhaps God will allow people to choose heaven after death. And, like many universalists Bell quoted Early Church Fathers (disciples from the first 300 years of the church), who gave intellectual assent to the concept.

Truth be told, it's not the concept itself that bothered me as much as the implication that this was some widespread idea. Over the years, I've heard many universalists try to erode the foundations of what the early church fathers really believed. So, I think Bell touched a sore spot for me. :)

Bell stated: *"At the center of the Christian tradition since the first church have been a number who insist that history is not tragic, hell is not forever, and love, in the end, wins and all will be reconciled to God" (Love Wins, pg 109).* Unfortunately, this is simply not true.

I have scoured almost every legitimate account by the early church fathers for years trying to investigate statements like this, and, aside from Origen and a couple others, the vast majority of historical accounts completely disagree.

Keep in mind: Origen (one of the disciples Bell quoted) said *a lot of things... even crazy things.* He wrote extensively on thousands of topics. Over the years, I've pulled dozens of contradictory

statements out of Origen – i.e., I can probably quote Origen to substantiate all sorts of crazy statements. Also keep in mind, Origen conjectured about a lot of things. But, I wish Bell would have *also* quoted the following statement of Origen who said:

“The apostolic teaching is that the soul...after its departure from the world, will be recompensed according to its deserts. It is destined to obtain either an inheritance of eternal life and blessedness (if its actions will have procured this for it) or to be delivered up to **eternal fire and punishments** (if the guilt of its crimes will have brought it down to this).” Origen (c.225, E), 4.240 (emphasis mine)

Over the years, many universalists and Jehovah's witnesses have claimed that “not one creed of the church” mentioned eternal torment before 500 A.D. And yes, figures like Pope Gregory the first introduced many strange doctrines into the church (such as purgatory). But these ideas about hell being temporary simply aren't as common as they like to believe.

First of all: one of the oldest creeds in the early church's existence refers to eternal condemnation. At the end of the *Nicene Creed* (not the *Nicene Constantinople Revision* that was a more “popularized revision” made at a later date) it refers to eternal damnation: the “anathematizing” of anyone who disagrees with that creed.

Secondly, the statement that there is “no documented belief” is virtually impossible. There are dozens upon dozens of early Christian writings that endorse eternal damnation. In fact, the evidence seems to show that the *vast majority* of early church fathers believed in eternal damnation.

In fact, allow me to quote at least **17 distinct Early Fathers** who wrote extensively on the subject. And, just to be thorough, I will include Ante-Nicene Fathers of both Eastern and Western schools of thought (many of which lived in diverse locations):

- ☐ “The way of darkness is crooked, and it is full of cursing. It is the way of eternal death with punishment” **Barnabas (circa 70-130 A.D.)**, 1.149.
- ☐ “All souls are immortal, even those of the wicked. Yet, it would be better for them if they were not deathless. For they are punished with the endless vengeance of quenchless fire. Since they do not die, it is impossible for them to have an end put to their misery.” **Clement of Alexandria (circa 195A.D.)**, 2.580 from a fragment in a post-Nicene manuscript.
- ☐ “You should fear what is truly death, which is reserved for those who will be condemned to the eternal fire. It will afflict those who are committed to it even to the end.” **Letter to Diognetus (c. 125-200 A.D.)**, 1.29.
- ☐ “Those who have not known God and do evil are condemned to death. However, those who have known God and have seen His mighty works, but still continue in evil, will be chastised doubly, and will die forever.” **Hermas (c.150A.D.)** 2.50
- ☐ “He goes to the everlasting punishment of fire” **Justin Martyr (c.160 A.D.)**, 1.166
- ☐ “For we believe...that every man will suffer punishment in eternal fire according to the merits of his deed....Sensation remains to all who have ever lived, and eternal punishment is laid up.” **Justin Martyr (c. 160)** 1.168,169.
- ☐ We who are now easily susceptible to death, will afterwards receive immortality with either enjoyment or with pain.” **Tatian (c.160A.D.)**, 1.71
- ☐ “He who acts righteously will escape the eternal punishments, and he will be thought worthy of the eternal life from God.” **Theophilus (c.180A.D.)** 2.108.
- ☐ “Eternal fire is prepared for sinners. The Lord has plainly declared this, and the rest of the Scriptures demonstrate it.” **Irenaeus (c.180, E/W)**, 1.401.
- ☐ “But the profane, and all who are not true worshippers of God, in like manner will be consigned to the punishment of everlasting fire.” **Tertullian (c.197, W)** 3.54.
- ☐ “I am not ignorant that many [pagans], in the consciousness of what they deserve, would prefer to believe that they will become nothing after death. For they would rather be altogether extinguished, rather than to be restored for the purpose of punishment....There is neither limit nor termination of these torments.” **Mark Minucius Felix (c. 200, W)** 4.194,195.
- ☐ “Those who eat will receive eternal life and will enjoy the tree of life in Paradise, with Adam and all the righteous. But the souls of the unrighteous meet an untimely expulsion from the presence of God, who will leave them to remain in the flame of torment.” **Hippolytus (c.205, W)**, 5.173.
- ☐ “Luxury and the short-lived joys of the world are ruining you. As a result, you will be tormented in Gehenna for all time” **Commodianus (c.240, W)**, 4.207)

- “[God] has prepared heaven, but He has also prepared Gehenna. He has prepared places of refreshment, but he has also prepared eternal punishment.” **Cyprian (c.250, W)** 5.311
- “But we define the second death in this manner: It is the suffering of eternal pain. It is the condemnation of souls to eternal punishments to receive their deserts.” **Lactantius (c.304-313, W)** 7.61,62.
- “Do you dare to laugh at us when we speak of Gehenna, and fires that cannot be quenched - into which we have learned that souls are cast...They are cast in, and being annihilated, they pass away vainly in everlasting destruction.” **Arnobius (c.305, E)**, 6.439,440
- “He casts them into everlasting fire, even through they do not cease to direct their entreaties to Him” **Disputation of Archelaus and Manes (c.320, E)** 6.212

These are only a few quotations from a large sum of early teachings.. Many of the above authors wrote extensively on this topic.

In addition to decontextualizing Origen, universalists also like to cite Augustine of Hippo as endorsing a “widespread lack of belief in an eternal hell.” But, first of all, there was certainly no widespread unbelief in an eternal hell within the church. Many of the authors above comprised many of the most influential leaders of those times. Their regions & schools of thought were incredibly diverse (both Western and Eastern); and yet, they all unanimously endorsed an eternal hell. Secondly, when one understands the immediate circumstances of Augustine of Hippo (one of the first great adversaries of universalism), his statement becomes much less sensational.

If the true history of *Apokatastasis* (historical universalism) be known, it was clearly a minority belief and was often associated with a branch of Gnostic ethics. After enjoying isolated entertainment by a small handful during the early church era, it nearly died out entirely in Western Europe (with the exception of John Scotus Erigena and some of the lesser-known mystics.). Even in the middle ages, both Luther and Calvin distinctly rejected universalism.

Conclusion:

All things considered, I still enjoyed reading *Love Wins*. I wouldn't recommend it for anyone who lacks the "elementary teachings about ***eternal judgement***" that Hebrews 6 talks about. But for seminarians and critical thinkers, I think it's stimulating reading for people wanting to read scripture through a new filter. What I liked about the book was this:

(1). I like that people are finally starting to talk about a "free-will" concept of hell. Certainly, we are venturing into speculation by suggesting that hell may be "locked from the inside." But, there are certainly a good number of scriptures related to this topic that Bible teachers seem to ignore.

(2). I like that Bell "suggested" his ideas... instead of putting forth gray ideas as though they were black and white. Don't get me wrong: he also made black and white ideas more gray than they are (which is why I'm writing this); but, overall, I think he's *helped* the national discussion more than hurt it – even though he did it at the cost of his own credibility.

(3). I like that Bell addresses how Bible teachers abuse people with these doctrines. Many pastors use these doctrines to instill fear. And yes, I believe that it's good to have a healthy fear of the Lord (if you're already a believer). Yet, my Bible says that "*kindness leads people towards repentance*" (Romans 2:4). People do not have the ability to repent until they have an encounter with God's kindness. Indeed, any repentance that doesn't start with God's kindness is *false repentance*.

Christians need to stop trying to "talk people into repentance" ... or "scare people" into repentance. Because, even if we can create such false repentance in their hearts, they will never be able to sustain such an anemic walk with God.

Ultimately, the doctrines of hell are the ultimate symbol of God's love. He loves mankind so

deeply that he wants to create a boundary we will never forget. If we love our kids, we will be quite dramatic in our efforts to protect them. And in the same way, absolute love requires absolute boundaries.

For some of you, this may not fully resolve your questions about this doctrine; but, I encourage you to check out my video teaching series called "Stumped" (April-May 2013) as I will be addressing many questions such as: *"Is hell fair? Is the punishment proportionate to the crime? Did God really give us enough information?"*

In the meantime, you don't have to agree with everything I say. Research the topic for yourself. And whatever you do, grow closer to God through his word. Let's wrestle through our questions together!